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CHARACTERISTICS  
OF THE  
PESHITO SYRIAC VERSION  
OF THE  
NEW TESTAMENT.

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THE Peshito Syriac version of the New Testament is a very important and interesting document in sacred literature:

1. On account of its great antiquity, being referred by many learned men to the second century;

2. On account of the language, which is almost identical with the vernacular language of Christ and his apostles;

3. On account of its faithfulness and intrinsic worth, being free and unconstrained without being loose or paraphrastic; and

4. Because the manuscripts of it are derived to us without essential variations from Maronites, Jacobites, and Nestorians, who thus become vouchers for its faithful preservation.

Hence it has been highly and justly esteemed by the learned, and may be consulted with advantage on some controverted points of theology.

The following are some of the characteristics of this version.

1. It exhibits a text not conformed to any one recension, as these recensions probably originated at a later period. See Fosdick's *Hug*, pp. 96, 208, 209.

2. Certain religious terms from the Hebrew or Aramean, which, being consecrated in the affections of the pious, had been adopted in the original Greek, are naturally retained in the Peshito Syriac version; as, ܐܒܗ *abho* or *abha* for *abba*;

ܐܡܝܢ *amin* for *amen*; ܡܪܢ ܐܬܗ *moran-etho* for *maran-atha*;

ܬܫܒܗܘܬܗ *tseshhauth* for *sabaoth*; ܘܫܢܐ *ushano* for *hosanna*.

3. Hebrew or Aramean terms incorporated into the original Greek, are naturally retained in this version; as, ܥܘܪܐ *curo* for *cor*, (see Luke 16: 7.) ܣܬܐ *satho* for *seah*, (see Mat. 13: 33. Luke 13: 21.) ܦܪܝܫܐ *perisho* for *pharisee*, (see Luke 11: 37. etc.) ܙܕܝܚܘܝܐ *zadhukoyo* for *sadducee*, (see Mat. 16: 1. etc.) ܟܪܘܒܝܐ *kerubho* for *cherub*, (see Heb. 9: 5.) ܫܬܐܢܐ *sotono* for *satan*, (see Mat. 4: 10. etc.) ܫܒܐ *shabo* for *sabbath*, (see Mat. 12: 2. etc.) ܓܝܬܐ *gihano* for *gehenna*, (see Mat. 5: 22. etc.) But *bath*, Luke 16: 6. it has not retained.

4. The explanations or interpretations of Shemitish terms given in the original Greek, are often omitted in the Peshito version, as being superfluous. See Mat. 27: 46. Mark 5: 41. 7: 11, 34. John 1: 39, 42. The exceptions, however, are numerous. See Mat. 1: 23. 27: 33. Mark 14: 36. 15: 22, 34. John 19: 17. 20: 16. Acts 1: 19. Rom. 8: 15. Gal. 4: 6. It may be remarked here, that the Shemitish terms quoted in the Greek often have a Chaldaic rather than a Syriac form.

5. This version often transfers Greek or Latin words of the original text, instead of translating them, the introduction of such terms being usual in the Syriac of that age. See Hug, p. 201. So ܕܝܝܬܝܟܝ *diyathiki* uniformly for the Greek *διαθήκη*, whether in the sense of a covenant or of a testament. Also ܡܥܘܫܐ *megusho* for *μύθος*, probably a Persian word, Mat. 2: 1, 7, 16.

6. This version sometimes errs by reading the Greek text wrong. See Hug, p. 201.

7. In some leading terms, the Peshito often substitutes a Syriac word easily recognized by the student of Hebrew; as, ܐܠܘܗܐ *Aloho*, (comp. Heb. *Elohim*,) for 'God;' ܡܠܬܐ *malakho*, (comp. Heb. *malakh*,) for 'angel;' ܡܠܬܘܬܐ *mal-kutho*, (comp. Heb. *malkuth*,) for 'kingdom;' ܡܫܝܚܐ *meshiho*, (comp. Heb. *mashiah*,) for 'Christ;' ܡܠܐ *melo*, (comp. Heb. *milla*,) for 'word;' ܫܝܘܠ *sheyul*, (comp. Heb. *sheol*,) for

'hades;' *shidho*, ܫܝܕܗ (comp. Heb. *shedh*, Deut. 32: 17. Ps. 106: 37.) for 'demon.' It sometimes brings back proper names nearer to the Shemitish form, as ܝܫܢܢܐ *Yuhanon*, (comp. Heb. *Yohanan*, 1 Chr. 3: 15,) for 'Joannes.'

8. In some leading terms, the Peshito often substitutes a Syriac word which does not so easily accord with the Hebrew; as, ܕܐܝܘܐ *daiwo*, for 'demon;' ܐܡܕܗ *emadh* and its derivatives uniformly for the Greek *βαπτίζω* and its derivatives, whether in the sense of 'cleansing' or of 'overwhelming;' ܐܕܗܬܐ *idhto* for 'church;' ܩܫܝܫܐ *kashisho* for both 'presbyter' and 'bishop,' (comp. *kashisha* and *kasha*, 'a priest,' among the modern Nestorians;) ܩܢܝܫܬܐ *kenushto* for 'synagogue;' ܡܠܦܢܐ *malpono* for 'teacher,' (comp. *malpana*, 'a teacher,' among the modern Nestorians;) ܡܪܐ *more* for 'Lord,' (comp. *Mar*, the title of a bishop among the modern Nestorians;) ܐܡܠܝܬܐ *okhel-kartso* for the Greek *ἀδελφός*; ܫܠܝܠܐ *sheliho* for 'apostle.'

9. This version is distinguished for its simplicity. Thus Mat. 9: 1, 'And entering into the boat he passed over,' it renders thus: 'And he entered into the boat, and passed over,' as in our common English version. The same is done almost constantly.

10. This version in many passages makes the meaning clear and explicit by a short addition to the text, or by a slight change in the language or construction.

Mark 2: 26, '*When Abiathar was high priest.*' So also in the Modern Syriac version of the gospels published by the American missionaries. In the common English version, '*in the days of Abiathar the high priest.*'—Both very correctly as to the sense.

Luke 9: 34, 'And they feared, when *they saw Moses and Elias entering* into the cloud.' So also in the Modern Syriac version.—This rendering gives the force of the Greek pronoun *ἐξελθὺς*, in contradistinction to *αὐτοῖς*, which is entirely neglected in the common English version.

Luke 16: 8, 'And *our Lord* commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.' So also in the Modern

Syriac version.—This must be regarded as an oversight in the Syriac translator, for 'the lord' intended is evidently *the lord of the steward*, who was forced to commend what was injurious to himself, and not *our Lord*, that is, Christ.

Acts 1: 19, 'So that that field is called *in the language of the region* Hekal-demo.'—This is evidently a fair explanation of the phrase '*in their own proper tongue*.'

Acts 2: 14, 'But *after that* Simon Peter stood up with the eleven apostles, and lifted up his voice.'—The reason for adding this mark of time does not appear. Peter's speech refers to what had preceded. Of course it came after.

Acts 5: 4, '*Before it was sold*, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was not *its price* in thine own power?'—A free but correct rendering.

Acts 10: 38, '*Concerning* Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.'—This is evidently an attempt to simplify the intricate structure of the Greek.

Acts 12: 15, 'And they said unto her, *Thou art terrified*.'—This is intended for an explanation, but is less correct.

Rom. 12: 16, '*And whatever ye think concerning yourselves, that think also concerning your brethren*.'—A beautiful explanation.

Eph. 3: 1, 'For this cause I Paul *am* the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.'—The construction is filled out, but not happily.

Heb. 4: 8, 'For if Jesus, *the son of Nun*, had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day.'—The addition, 'the son of Nun,' helps the sense; but this addition is not made in the analogous passage, Acts 7: 45.

Heb. 10: 29, 'And hath counted *his* blood of the covenant *as of any common man*.' In the common English version, '*an unholy thing*.'—Both are fair explanations of the original term.

1 John 1: 1, 'We declare unto you him who was from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen with our eyes, we have seen and handled with our hands, *who is* the word of life.'—This is an important explanation, considering its great antiquity.

11. In the Peshito are some important omissions:

(1.) The phrase 'raise the dead,' Mat. 10: 8, is wanting in the *editio princeps* of the Peshito, 1555, and probably in

all the Syriac manuscripts. It has found its way, however, into the edition of Tremellius, 1569, and into subsequent editions, e. g. Gutbier, 1664. The Modern Syriac version of the gospels, published by the American missionaries at Oroomiah in 1845, has the words in a parenthesis, as in the Bible Society edition, 1816.—The words in the Greek text are justly suspected by critics.

(2.) The omission of 'Jeremiah,' Mat. 27: 9. So also in Mod. Syr. version.—A very important omission, which greatly relieves the difficulty of the passage. But it has not sufficient other vouchers.

(3.) 'That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots,' Mat. 27: 35. These words are wanting in the *editio princeps*, and probably in all the Syriac manuscripts. They were placed in the margin, however, by Tremellius, and have crept into subsequent editions, e. g. Hutter, 1599; Gutbier, 1664; Schaaf, 1717. They are wanting in Bib. Soc. Ed. 1816. The Modern Syriac version has them.—These words are rejected from the Greek text by critics. They have without doubt been interpolated by copyists from John 19: 24. The reference is to Ps. 22: 18.

(4.) 'And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.' Luke 22: 17, 18. These words are wanting in the *editio princeps*, and probably in all the Syriac manuscripts. They have found their way, however, into the edition of Tremellius, and into subsequent editions, e. g. Gutbier, 1664; Schaaf, 1717. In Bib. Soc. Ed. 1816, they are inserted in a parenthesis. The Modern Syriac version has them without any intimation of doubt.—There is no sufficient reason to doubt the genuineness of these words in the Greek text.

(5.) The story of the adulteress, John 7: 53—8: 11. It is wanting in the *editio princeps*, and probably in all the manuscripts. It is found, however, in the London Polyglot, copied from a manuscript of the Philoxenian Syriac version, and in some subsequent editions, e. g. Gutbier, 1664; Schaaf, 1717. In the Bible Society edition, it is said not to belong to the Peshito. The Modern Syriac version inserts the passage as doubtful.—Critics are divided as to the genuineness of this passage in the Greek.

(6.) 'And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.' Acts 8: 37. These words are probably wanting in all the manuscripts; but they are found in some editions, as Hutter, 1599; Gutbier, 1664; Schaaf, 1717; also in lower margin of Bib. Soc. Ed. 1816.—They are rejected by critics from the Greek text.

(7.) 'But it pleased Silas to abide there still.' Acts 15: 34. The insertion of these words is ascribable to Tremellius. They are found in Gutbier, 1554; Schaaf, 1717; and in lower margin of Bib. Soc. Ed. 1816.—These words are doubtful.

(8.) 'Your blood be upon your own heads.' Acts 18: 6. These words are found in margin of Bib. Soc. Ed. 1816, as from the Greek.—There is no other voucher for the omission of these words from the Greek text.

(9.) 'And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasonings among themselves.' Acts 28: 29. These words are found in Gutbier, 1664; also in the margin of Bib. Soc. Ed. 1816.—The evidence in favor of these words in the Greek text greatly preponderates.

(10.) The famous passage 1 Jo. 5: 7. This passage is wanting in the *editio princeps*, and probably in all the manuscripts. It is found in Gutbier, 1664; Schaaf, 1717. It is wanting in Bib. Soc. Ed. 1816.—This passage is rejected from the Greek text by all critics.

12. The Peshito version interchanges certain terms of the original Greek, as being synonymous in the view of the translator.

(1.) This version employs Syr. ܐܠܬܐܝܢ *kashisho*, i. e. elder, not only for Gr. *πρεσβύτερος*, i. e. elder, (see *passim*;) but also for Gr. *ἐπίσκοπος*, i. e. bishop, (see Phil. 1: 1. 1 Tim. 3: 2. Tit. 1: 7. also 1 Tim. 3: 1.) thus showing that Gr. *πρεσβύτερος* or *elder* and Gr. *ἐπίσκοπος* or *bishop* were regarded by the translator as synonymous terms.—Our common English version distinguishes the two Greek words in the translation.

(2.) This version employs Syr. ܫܝܬܐ *sheyul*, 'hades,' not only for Gr. *ᾗδης*, 'hades,' (see Acts 2: 27, 31. 1 Cor. 15: 55. Rev. 1: 18. et *passim*;) but sometimes also for Gr. *θάνατος*, 'death,' (see Acts 2: 24 bis,) and for Gr. *φυλακή*, 'prison,' (see 1 Pet. 3: 19.) also adds it to Gr. *ἄβυσσος*,

'deep,' (see Rom. 10: 7.) thus showing that these latter terms in these passages, in the view of the translator, denoted *hades*.—Our common English version distinguishes these terms from *hades* in the translation.

(3.) This version employs Syr. ܪܫܐ *sotono*, i. e. *satan*, not only for Gr. *σατανᾶς*, 'satan,' (see Mat. 4: 10. 12: 26 bis. Mark 1: 13. 3: 23 bis. 8: 33. Rev. 20: 2, 7. et passim,) but sometimes also for Gr. *διάβολος*, i. e. 'devil,' (see Mat. 13: 39.) and for Gr. *Βελιαλ* or *Βελιαγ*, (see 2 Cor. 6: 15.) thus showing that Gr. *σατανᾶς*, Gr. *διάβολος*, and Gr. *Βελιαλ* or *Βελιαγ*, were regarded as synonymous terms.—Our common English version keeps these Greek words distinct in the translation.

13. The Peshito version interchanges the signification of certain Syriac terms, as if synonymous.

Thus it employs Syr. ܕܡܫܚܬܐ *kenushhto*, which usually refers to a *synagogue* or Jewish assembly, (see passim,) once in reference to a *church* or Christian assembly, (see James 2: 2.) and also Syr. ܕܡܫܚܬܐ *idhto*, which usually refers to a church or Christian assembly, (see passim,) once in reference to a synagogue or Jewish assembly, (see Heb. 2: 12. not Acts 7: 38.) thus showing, as do also the original Greek terms, a tendency in these words to be used as synonyms.—Our common English version shows the same tendency in the use of the words *synagogue* and *church*, (see Acts 7: 38. Heb. 2: 12. not James 2: 2.)

14. The Peshito version sometimes accurately distinguishes words which are not synonymous in the original.

(1.) It employs Syr. ܕܡܫܚܬܐ *gihano* for Gr. *γέννα* uniformly, (except James 3: 6.) and Syr. ܕܡܫܚܬܐ *sheyul* for Gr. *ἔδης* uniformly, thus clearly distinguishing the two words.—Our common English version confounds them very improperly.

(2.) It employs Syr. ܕܡܫܚܬܐ *shidho*, (Mat. 7: 22.) and ܕܡܫܚܬܐ *daiwo* (Mat. 12: 24.) for Gr. *δαίμωνιον* and *δαίμων*, and thus distinguishes them from *διάβολος* or *σατανᾶς*, for which it never uses *shidho*.—Our common English version very improperly confounds these terms.

15. Certain leading terms, which, owing to the genius of the English language, require to be differently translated in different places in our common English version, are left



undistinguished in the Syriac Peshito, as in the original Greek. This is what we should expect.

(1.) The Peshito employs Syr. ܠܟܘܪܫܐ <sup>ܟܘܪܫܐ</sup> *kursyo*, denoting both 'a throne' and 'a common seat,' for Gr. *θρόνος*.—Our common English version vacillates between *throne* and *seat*, supposing Gr. *θρόνος* in some passages (Rev. 4: 4. 11: 16.) to denote a common seat.

(2.) It transfers Syr. ܕܝܬܐܬܝܬܐ <sup>ܕܝܬܐܬܝܬܐ</sup> *diyathiki* for Gr. *διαθήκη*, uniformly, and that, as we should expect, whether it signifies 'a covenant,' as *passim*, or 'a testament,' as Heb. 9: 16, 17.—Our common English version vacillates between *covenant* and *testament*; and that without discrimination.

(3.) It employs Syr. ܡܠܟܝܐ <sup>ܡܠܟܝܐ</sup> *malakho* for Gr. *ἄγγελος*, and that whether the Greek word denotes a common messenger, as Luke 9: 52. or a celestial messenger, i. e. an angel, as Mat. 1: 20.—Our common English version properly distinguishes these two senses, and that, (except 1 Cor. 11: 10. Rev. 1: 20 ff. where the meaning is contested,) to the satisfaction of all.

(4.) It employs Syr. ܫܠܝܠܐ <sup>ܫܠܝܠܐ</sup> *sheliho* for Gr. *ἀπόστολος*, uniformly, and that whether the Greek word denotes a common messenger, as John 13: 16. or a messenger of God or Christ, i. e. an apostle, as Mat. 10: 2. Luke 11: 49.—Our common English version properly distinguishes the two significations, and that to the satisfaction of all, except that a disposition is sometimes shown to exalt Epaphroditus to the character of an apostle, see Phil. 2: 25.

(5.) It employs Syr. ܥܡܕܬܐ <sup>ܥܡܕܬܐ</sup> *emadh* and its derivatives for Gr. *βαπτίζω* and its derivatives, and that uniformly, whether it denotes religious washings or not.—Our common English version vacillates between *transferring* and *translating* the word; and that not consistently.\*

16. The Peshito renders Gr. *τὰ σάββατα*, when used in a singular signification by a singular noun, as Mat. 12: 1, 10, 11, 12. elsewhere in the plural, as Acts 17: 2. Col. 2: 16.—Our translation vacillates between the singular and the plural without consistency.

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\* See a very able monograph on this use of the Syriac word *emadh* by James Murdock, D.D. in *Bibl. Sacra*, vol. vii. pp. 733 ff.